

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SAB-02 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3268

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PBOR, PN

SUBJECT: THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY MEETING ON TREATY

1. TORRIJOS CLOSED A THREE-AND-A-HALF-HOUR MORNING SESSION OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES WITH A BRIEF SPEECH OF SUPPORT FOR THE DRAFT TREATY. THE SESSION WILL CONTINUE THIS AFTERNOON.

2. TORRIJOS REFERRED TO THE AGREEMENT ON A NEW TREATY AS A "TRIUMPH" OF WHICH HE IS PROUD. HE SAID THE TREATY WILL PROVIDE FOR "RAPID DECOLONIZATION" OF THE CANAL ZONE. HE ALSO REFERRED TO THE OFTEN-STAED PANAMANIAN POSITION THAT THIS GOVERNMENT HAS CHOSEN TO NEGOTIATE TO RESOLVE THE CANAL PROBLEM, IN PREFERENCE TO SHORTER, BLOODIER MEANS. TORRIJOS PRAISED PRESIDENT CARTER FOR COURAGE TO TELL THE TRUTH TO THE AMERICAN PUBLIC. HE CALLED FOR A FULL AND OPEN DISCUSSION OF THE DRAFT OF THE TREATY IN PANAMA. HE SAID THAT "CRITICISM OF THE TREATY WOULD NOT BE CONSIDERED CRITICISM OF THE GOVERNMENT", BUT URGED THAT ALL CRITICISM BE RESPONSIBLE.

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3. PRIOR TO TORRIJOS' SPEECH, FOREIGN MINISTER GONZALEZ REVILLA, AS WELL AS NEGOTIATORS ESCOBAR, ROYO, AHUMADA AND FABREGA SPOKE ON SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE COURSE OF SESSION. NO TREATY TEXTS WERE RELEASED, THOUGH A LANDS AND WATERS MAP WAS USED IN THE TELEVISED PRESENTATION. HOWEVER, ESCOBAR DID READ THE TEXT OF A PARAGRAPH

WHICH HE SAID WAS TREATY LANGUAGE ON THE SEA-LEVEL CANAL OPTION. A GENERAL FACT-SHEET, WHICH WE HAVE NOT YET SEEN, WAS RELEASED TO THE PUBLIC.

4. ESCOBAR DREW THE TOUGHEST TASK, EXPLAINING THE NEUTRALITY TREATY. HE WENT INTO ELABORATE DETAIL ON THE HISTORY OF THE NEGOTIATION OF THE TREATY, WHICH ENDED UP BEING COMPLETELY SATISFACTORY TO PANAMA.

5. THOUGH SOME OF THE SPEAKERS WERE DEFENSIVE AND ATTACKED DOMESTIC OPPOSITION TO THE TREATY, THE GENERAL TONE WAS UPBEAT. THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT'S PUBLIC POSITION ON THE TREATY SINCE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE AGREEMENT IN PRINCIPLE HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN VERY LOW KEY AND EVEN STRANGELY NEGATIVE. (IT IS A "PEBBLE" IN TORRIJOS' SHOE, ETC.)

6. ESCOBAR WAS THE MOST EMOTIONAL OF THE SPEAKERS, DELIVERING A STEMWINDER OF NATIONALISTIC RHETORIC. AT ONE POINT HE SAID THAT PANAMA WOULD TAKE A VIOLENT ROUTE IF THE U.S. SENATE SHOULD REJECT THE TREATY. THE PRESENTATION IN GENERAL SEEMED ACCURATE TO US THOUGH WE DETECTED A FEW ERRORS AND EXAGGERATIONS FOR POLITICAL EFFECT. IF THE AFTERNOON SESSION (BILLED AS A QUESTION-AND-ANSWER PERIOD) GOES WELL, THIS WILL HAVE BEEN FROM OUR VIEWPOINT, A PRETTY GOOD KICKOFF TO THE RATIFICATION CAMPAIGN.

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Message Attributes

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